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THE SECULAR HEBREW POETRY OF ITALY

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CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF MOSES HAYYIM LUZZATTO.

THE seventeenth century, as we have seen, was a period of transition. The poets of this period, though but few really deserve the name, are still vacillating between the old and the new, both in style, in versification, and in subject matter. But a great gain has been made in the development of poetry. The Hebrew, both in diction and in style, gradually assumes a more modern form; the new Italian versification introduced, gradually wins favor, and becomes firmly established; and the scope of poetry has widened. The eighteenth century sees the complete conquest of modernity. The Italian form of versification is the *sine qua non* of the poets, is taken as a matter of course, and the poetic tone becomes more and more secular. The religious feelings which inevitably manifest themselves, since these poets were all intensely religious, run as an undercurrent and not as the main stream. The number of poets also increases, though of many we have only isolated poems published, the greater bulk still remaining in manuscript. And during this century, we meet with truly gifted poets, men inspired, men who sang because they could not help singing, because their poetic souls demanded expression; and it is during this period that we come across the great,

consummate poetic genius in the person of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto.

During the first quarter of the eighteenth century, a number of minor poets continued the work of the seventeenth century poets in clearing the diction and freeing the style from the affectation and artificialities of mediævalism. Eliezer Cohen of Leghorn, in his dramatic poem *ייבוה בין עשיר ועני* written in 1680³⁹ shows a mastery of free versification. The argument of the poem in brief is this: A rich man glorying in the possession of his wealth meets a poor man equally glorying in his poverty. Each one tries to convince the other of the advantage he possesses, the rich man in the power of his wealth, the poor man in his freedom from care. The dispute waxes so heated that each draws his sword on the other, but the quarrel is settled by a third man who shows the strength and weakness of the position of each combatant and winds up by quoting Solomon's prayer: Give me neither poverty nor riches. These thoughts, however, are couched in smoothly flowing rimes, the poet employing several forms of the Italian stanza as well as the rimed prose of mediæval poets both of which make pleasant reading. Eliezer b. Gerson Hefez (Gentile)⁴⁰ whose two poems, a sonnet and a longer poem in *terza rima*, are extant (*Kol 'Ugab*, Nos. 5, 11), possesses a fine style and a forcible and poetic diction. Samson Cohen Modon (1679—June 10, 1727),⁴¹ of Mantua, a member of a very prominent family, a man of

³⁹ *Kol 'Ugab*, No. 33.

⁴⁰ Possibly a brother of Moses b. Gerson Hefez (1664—Venice, 1712), the father of Gerson, the young author of *Yad Haruzim*. See Neppi-Ghirondi, 239.

⁴¹ Della Volta's biography in *Kerem Chemed*, II; Steinschneider, *C. B.; Jewish Encyclopedia*, s. v.

wide education both secular and rabbinic, at one time connected with the Mantuan rabbinate though for the most part engaged in commerce, was a master of the sonnet. A moralist and given to the didactic, his *ḲOL MUSAR* (Mantua 1725), a collection of fifty sonnets, is an elegant and finished product, written as it is in a refreshingly fine Hebrew, and perfect in rime and rhythm. These sonnets are philosophic in character, and contain many keen reflections on things of deep human interest. One of his sonnets is addressed to Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto (Introduction to his *לשון למורים*). (The *ḲOL MUSAR* is introduced by the congratulatory poems of David Finzi, rabbi of Mantua and father-in-law of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, and of Dr. Kalonymos d'Italia and Dr. Raphael Vita d'Italia.) Isaac Levi (*מן הלויים*), a grandson of Leon da Modena⁴² and Venetian rabbi, composed a number of epitaphs which, however, lack the brilliancy of his famous grandfather. David Nieto (1654-1728), a native of Venice, who practised medicine and officiated as rabbi at Leghorn whence he was called to London in 1702 to become the Ḥakam of the Sephardic community, also tried his hand at verse-making and not unhappily. His poem of ten octaves (*Ḳol 'Ugab*, No. 1), though somewhat hyperbolic in tone, betrays deep feelings, and is easy and graceful. The "Reflections" of Joseph Baruch b. Moses Cases,⁴³ a younger contemporary of Zacuto, physician and rabbi at Mantua, are well written and contain some lyric touches. Fine are the lines:

Fleeter than an eagle's flight
The days rush by and life is o'er;

⁴² Dr. A. Berliner, Introduction to *Lukot Abanim*; Neppi-Ghirondi, pp. 165-76, where he is spoken of as a poet in a large sense.

⁴³ See Neppi-Ghirondi, 129, 254.

An instant, and life's bridge is spanned,
And, lo! we are no more.

(*Kol 'Ugab*, No. 32). The sonnets of Isaac Vita Cantarini (died 1723)⁴⁴ and of his pupil Shabbethai Marini (died 1748),⁴⁵ both physicians as well as rabbis of Padua, in honor of Abraham Cohen's *Kehunnat Abraham*, are graceful, though Cantarini's short poems contained in his עת קץ (Amsterdam 1710) have no poetic value at all. Isaiah Bassani (d. 1739), teacher and staunch friend of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto,⁴⁶ rabbi of Cento, Padua, and Reggio successively, while betraying no poetic depth of feeling, is a master of diction and of a clear, incisive style. His sonnet is finished, his octave is clever, and his elegy on Benjamin Cohen, his father-in-law (d. 1721), in sixty-nine *terza rima* stanzas⁴⁷ is vigorous (*Kol 'Ugab*, Nos. 6, 14, 64). While

⁴⁴ This date is given by Neppi, p. 143. Ghironi, quoting Isaac Pacifico, gives the date of his death as 1742, at the age of over ninety. Fürst, *Bibl. Jud.*, s. v., gives the date of his birth as 1644; he was still living in 1718. Comp. his sonnet in *Kehunnat Abraham*, Venice 1719. He was an eminent physician sought after by the Italian nobility, as well as the head of the rabbinical college of Padua. He is the author also of *Pi Sefarim* (which I have not seen). His grandson Ḥayyim Moses Cantarini is likewise spoken of as a poet by Ghironi who was in possession of his manuscript (Neppi-Ghironi, p. 102, 238).

⁴⁵ He translated Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into Hebrew octaves, the publication of which was interrupted by his death. His SHIRIM (34 Sonnets) and his rimed version of the PIRKE ABOT are still in manuscript. Fürst: Shabbetai Vita Ma'ini, *Literaturblatt des Orients*, 1820, c. 124; *Bibl. Jud.*, s. v.

⁴⁶ *Kol 'Ugab*, No. 9; Neppi-Ghironi, p. 154. M. H. Luzzatto in *Leshon Limmudim* (Warsaw 1891, p. 78) quotes a few lines from an epithalamium written by Bassani in honor of Isaac b. Shabbethai Marini, and speaks of it in the highest term of praise.

⁴⁷ He was a disciple of Zacuto, rabbi of Reggio, and teacher of M. Ḥ. Luzzatto. Abraham Kahana in his "Life of Luzzatto" (Hebrew, Warsaw 1898) asserts that Benjamin Cohen, an eminent kabbalist, a favorite disciple of Zacuto's, and himself a fervent poet, exerted a great influence upon Luzzatto both as a kabbalist and as a poet. I have not been able to obtain any of Benjamin Cohen's poems.

the intrinsic poetic value of these men is not great, they emphasized the best elements of the poetic expression of the seventeenth century, and perfected the outer form of Hebrew poetry. The spirit of modernity which was thus struggling for realization was soon to find embodiment in the truly gifted Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto.

Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto (1707-1747), a descendant of an old scholarly family, is the most tragic figure in the history of modern Hebrew poetry. A poet born, a man of splendid natural abilities, he received the most careful education which the wealth of his father, a rich silk merchant of Padua, could obtain for him. A precocious child, he mastered early Hebrew and Latin, the two languages which in Italy at that time, were the standards of Jewish and Christian culture respectively. The restless energy of his mind found expression already in his seventeenth year in a drama "Samson and the Philistines," of which only fragments are extant, and before he was twenty he had composed 150 Psalms in imitation of the Psalms of David. Both these works, written in a clear, pure, vigorous Biblical Hebrew, simple, direct, easy, and vivid, already foreshadowed the master. Had he followed his natural tendencies, had he devoted himself to the Hebrew muse for which he had been born, he would have been the most imposing figure in Hebrew literature, the Hebrew poet *par excellence*. Poetry, as his later productions proved, though written in the stress and storm of conflict and strife, was, with him, a part of his soul. There was little of the *fit*, and all of the *nascitur* in him. Moreover, it would have spared him the many persecutions, humiliations, and sorrows which rendered his life so tragic. Unfortunately, in 1727, he became possessed of a passion for mysticism, and a burning desire for the study of the

Kabbalah, in which he seems to have been encouraged by his teacher Isaiah Bassani, at that time rabbi at Padua. While his logical mind would under ordinary circumstances have easily seen through the hollowness of the thing, his great, poetic imagination proved his undoing. Fascinated by the glitter and charm of the Zohar, absorbing rather than discerning its mysteries, he mastered them so thoroughly, that he was enabled to write a "Second Zohar," a perfect imitation of the first in language and style, and surpassing it in logic (if logic and Kabbalah are compatible at all), for he endeavored to systematize the mystic teachings! His enthusiasm and poetic fervor soon led him beyond all bounds, in that he began to believe that he had a special guardian angel who appeared before him in nightly visions, and taught him the mystic sciences while a host of higher beings, among them patriarchs and saints, listened to his words of wisdom. Nor could his ardent soul keep such things to himself. A small circle of loyal disciples grouped themselves about him and listened spell-bound to his eloquent and glowing as well as erudite interpretation of the Kabbalah according to the new light he had received from his guardian angel. Carried away by his enthusiasm he even intimated to them that he himself was the Messiah! One of his disciples, Jeḳuthiel Gordon of Wilna who had come to Padua to study medicine, but fell under the magic of the Kabbalah as personified by Luzzatto, could not refrain himself from confiding to a kabbalist in Vienna and to Joshua Höschel, rabbi of Wilna, in 1729, the wonderful powers of Luzzatto. The secret thus leaked out. From that time Luzzatto became the center of strife, contention, and persecution which terminated only with his life.

The tragic career of this remarkable man, resembling, as Graetz suggested, in his life that of Spinoza and in his death that of Judah Halevi, is too well known to need repetition. But crowded as his life was with many activities, among which the Kabbalah claimed the lion's share, he nevertheless found opportunity to respond to the real call of his nature, to that of the muse; and this, it was, that saved him from oblivion. For, busy as a kabbalist, forcible as a moralist, and excellent as a rhetorician, his poetical works are his chief claim to distinction. His poetic spirit found expression in two dramatic poems, *MIGDAL 'Oz* (*Strong Tower*) and *LA-YESHARIM TEHILLAH* (*Praise for the Righteous*), the former written about 1727, the latter in 1743.

While the dramatic form of poetry had already been introduced in Hebrew literature by Zacuto in his *Yesod 'Olam*, Luzzatto's *Migdal 'Oz* is the first romantic drama in Hebrew literature. Luzzatto is the first to strike the keynote of true modernity in that his drama is not, like Zacuto's, a mere pretext, a collection of rimes and sonnets loosely connected with a plot ready made in the midrashic interpretations of biblical texts. With Luzzatto the dramatic form is essential. For the first time in Hebrew literature he undertakes to depict that most intensely dramatic human passion—the passion of love. Hitherto the erotic theme had hardly been touched upon by Hebrew poets. The innate modesty of the Jew, and the sadness and uncertainty of the Jewish life in the Middle Ages, made the subject of love a thing profane. Even that most beautiful and most passionate biblical erotic idyll, the "Song of Songs", has been interpreted by the rabbis as representing the alliance of God, the lover, with Israel, the bride. When a poet did

venture upon this subject, it was only incidental. Spanish poets, and especially Immanuel, early in the fourteenth century, sang of love, after the fashion of their time, but the ingenious licentiousness of the "Maḥberet" with its riot of passion, levity, and frivolity was Italian rather than Jewish, and repelled rather than attracted. All through the middle ages, the somberness and seriousness of Jewish life reflected themselves in Hebrew poetry which was in consequence equally somber and serious. But this youth of twenty appeared, and, in an instant, as it were, cleared the atmosphere of the despair of the ages, and breathed into the Ghetto the spirit of love, the love of man for woman, of woman for man, with its sorrows and its joys! This innovation alone was sufficient to revolutionize the character of Hebrew poetry. It is this, above anything else, that stamps Luzzatto as *modern*. But not alone in *matter*, but also in *manner* did Luzzatto prove himself a pioneer, for he created an entirely new style of diction, of expression, of versification. To express real human emotions and human passions, biblical phraseology was altogether inadequate. Hitherto, writers, both in prose and verse, displayed their ingenuity by burying their thoughts beneath an ocean of ready-made biblical phrases, quoted bodily from the Bible and Talmud whether the entire quotation fitted into the context or not. To these were concatenated an endless chain of other complete phrases, with indefinite allusions to the sources quoted, thus forming a whole, ingenious beyond comparison, but puzzling, mystifying, hard to unravel. Scholars writing for scholars, only those thoroughly at home in biblical and rabbinical literature could fathom their meaning; and the style was admired in proportion to its ingenuity and complexity. Luzzatto's

depth of feeling and clearness of vision demanded a clear, incisive style; a free and lucid form of expression. His words, of course, are taken from the Bible, but pure as gold, without the dross of Aramaisms. His phrases are all of his own mintage; they represent his thoughts exactly, accurately. The resultant is an exceedingly graceful, pliable, smooth style, but vigorous and incisive withal. The blank verse which Luzzatto introduced in his drama, with longer and shorter lines of nine and six syllables respectively, is exceedingly rhythmic and musical, and flows softly like the tones of a harp, like the murmur of a brook.

The argument of the *MIGDAL 'Oz* written as an epithalamium is highly romantic. Ram, King of the land of the East, promises to give his daughter Salome in marriage to the man who would discover the entrance to a magnificent but inaccessible tower situated on the top of a lofty mountain near his capital. Unaware of this offer, a young foreign prince, Shalom, attracted by the mystery of the tower, explores it and effects an entrance through a secret gate which he leaves ajar. Ziphah, a worthless young fellow of Ram's capital, finding the gate open, enters the tower and then claims his bride from the king, which is granted, and the wedding-day is publicly announced. Meanwhile, Prince Shalom meets the princess and a passionate love springs up between them, though Salome would not prove false to her betrothed Ziphah whom she despises. Adah, the bosom friend of the princess, herself in love with Shalom, discovers the secret attachment and determines upon the ruin of the princess. She arranges a clandestine meeting between Shalom and Salome, hatches a plot against the life of Ziphah in the name of the princess, and then denounces her. The stern king, in accordance with law,

condemns his daughter to be burned, unless some one were to offer his life in her stead. Shalom offers himself in the princess' place, and confesses to having entered the secret tower which he thought was against the law of the land. Thereupon Shalom is recognized as the legitimate suitor for the hand of the princess, Adah confesses her intrigue, and everything ends happily.

Crude as is the conception of the plot, and feeble as is the dramatic action of *MIGDAL 'OZ*, it is nevertheless a finished work of art. The hero and the heroine as well as the other persons in the play, while they do not stand close scrutiny as character-drawings, are none the less living men and women. The passions that animate them are real, felt. Both Shalom and Salome are very young, very passionate, and given to ranting, but their monologues are crowded with beautiful thoughts and still more beautiful lines. The heroine is a type of womanly chastity and reserve, and the sentiment throughout the drama is lofty and elevated, chaste and pure, and thoroughly Jewish. The poet indulges in many observations which betray a keen insight into the affairs of practical life and a fine eye for the beauties of nature.

A few lines translated freely are here given by way of illustration:

“O let the rocks of thy majestic height
Whom I have taught to echo with her name
Tell of the sorrows of my heart;
O let each tree, a-murmur with the wind,
Tell of my grief. O let each bird a-wing
Across the eastern hills sing of the gloom
That gathered on my brow.

(Letteris' edition, p. 8).

The soul divine which born 'midst God's
Immense expanse, without a fence
To bound its vast immensity,
E'en though confined within a frame
Does loathe its narrowness; unused
To limit in its former home.

(*ibid.*, p. 31).

The shepherd boy who feeds his flocks,
How happy is his lot!
The leader of his sheep, he walks,
Glad even in his poverty,
Secure within the shadow lies:
His heart and face both twins in joy!
All happy though so poor.
His spirit knows not lust of wealth,
Nor glory is his soul's desire;
Though thorns and thistles be his food,
His happiness does make them sweet.
Upon his wretched couch at night
He finds repose; the morning finds
The bloom of youth upon his cheek.
If wasted be the fields or full,
If black and stormy be the skies,
His heart is firm and troubles not.
He fears no ambush, nor does stand
In dread of perjured witnesses:
All happy though so poor!

(*ibid.*, p. 43).

None can decipher, none can see
The heavens' hidden cryptogram;

Yet from between the reason's rifts
The wise may gaze and catch a glimpse.

(*ibid.*, p. 57).

The conceit of the echo responding to certain words of the hero's monologue, thus forming a cryptic sentence of prophecy, is rather factitious from a modern point of view. Luzzatto was very likely influenced by Zacuto who introduced this device in his *TOFTE 'ARUK*. This, however, does not detract from the charm of the poem. Taking into consideration the youth of the poet, *MIGDAL 'Oz* stands as a fine work of poetic art, suggestive of still greater possibilities in years of maturity.

LA-YESHARIM TEHILLAH (*Praise to the Righteous*), modeled after Guarini's *Pastor Fido*, and written in 1743, represents the poet's maturity both in thought and style. It is an allegoric, symbolic drama describing the struggle between right and wrong and the final triumph of the right. While his earlier work is somewhat diffuse, and lacking in depth, this drama is terse and philosophic. The plot, if one may call it such with an almost total absence of dramatic action, is feeble, as is the case with most allegoric plays. Nor is the subject itself altogether new, even in Hebrew literature (cf. Penso's *התקוה אסירי*). But the beauty and perfection of its style, the music and rythm of its meter, the profundity of thought, and the poetic spirit that pervades every line, render it a masterpiece of the highest rank. Published in 1743, it left its impress upon all subsequent Hebrew literature, and deservedly remains a classic to the present day.

The argument of the allegory is as follows: Truth (*Emet*) the father of probity (*Yosher*), betrothed his son

to Fame (*Tehillah*) the daughter of Multitude (*Hamon*), while the children were still in their infancy. At the time of their birth, Lust (*Taawah*), the maid of Truth and living in his house, also gave birth to a son, when the army of Confusion (*Mebukah*) plundered the city and took the children captive. For fear that his servant's son might be mistaken for that of his own, Truth left a description of him with Judgment (*Mishpat*) before his death. Many years later, Deceit (*Tarmit*) who had reared Lust's son, naming him Arrogance (*Rahab*), succeeded in persuading Multitude that Arrogance was the real son of Truth, and he was accordingly betrothed to Fame. Meanwhile, Probity, unknown and ignored, lived in the same city, and he and Fame fell deeply in love with each other, though Multitude insisted upon marrying her to Arrogance. A great feast was prepared for the occasion of the wedding when a terrific storm broke over the palace of Multitude shaking it to its foundation. Taking this as an omen of God's displeasure, an old man urges Multitude to investigate whether Arrogance be the real son of Truth, after all. This was done in the palace of Judgment, when Reason proves that Probity was the real son of Truth. Arrogance was dismissed in disgrace, and Probity marries Fame.

While there is no attempt at character study, all the *dramatis personae* being symbolic, Luzzatto evinces a deep insight into human nature. Probity, in his desperate struggle against Arrogance, is upheld and supported by Patience, Reason, and Meditation, while Arrogance is supported by Deceit. Multitude who alone can be the father of Fame, is characterized by Reason as "bending with every wind like a reed in water." His servant is Folly.

Multitude, while heartily in favor of his daughter's marriage with Arrogance, is scared out of his wits at the first sign of danger. At the banquet hall, as the house is shaken by the wind, at a mere suggestion of the old man that Arrogance might not be the real son of Truth, Multitude turns against Arrogance at once. Deceit tries in vain to argue him out of his fear, or to persuade him not to condemn Arrogance before Judgment decided against him. Multitude's mind is already made up. This bit of satire directed against the pliability and uncertainty of popular favor, the poet may have drawn out of his own sad experiences; had he not himself known the varying mood of the people both of praise and condemnation? The underlying basis of the allegory may have been his own philosophy of life. Probity, right, supported by patience and reason; reason based upon the working of the laws of God in the universe must inevitably triumph in the struggle with wrong and falsehood. For a time these may have the upper hand, but the man of probity,

.....Whatever haps
 Stands a pillar of brass and iron,
 Stands mighty; nor for an instant
 Leaves his place or stands aside.

(Warsaw edition, 1857, 26). Right will ultimately triumph and even fame will acknowledge him as her own.

Profound and lofty as is the thought of this poem, the extreme simplicity and beauty of the style and the diction in which it is couched add a charm of their own to the drama which captivates the reader. From the first to the last line there is a dignity about it that impresses itself at once even upon the most casual. There is not a superfluous line, not an unnecessary word. Every mon-

ologue or dialogue is an essential part of the poem, and any omission would be detrimental to the whole. The philosophic conceptions of justice, right, and reason are here conveyed in a manner simple, direct, appealing. The dialogue between Reason and Probity in the first and second acts are especially lofty in conception, perfect in execution, and majestic in expression; the monologue of Meditation in the second act may rank with the noblest poetic lines of any language. The great difference between the poet's earlier and later work can be seen at a glance when one compares the pastoral in MIGDAL 'Oz with that of this play. The second is evidently a copy of the first but is much more refined, more spiritual, more elevated in every respect.

Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto was the darling child of the muses. And thinking of the tragic life and the tragic death of this sweet singer in Israel one cannot but subscribe to the words of Dr. S. Bernfeld: "As one reads these creations of Luzzatto, one cannot rid himself of a feeling of grief, for he thinks then: What might not have become of this richly endowed poet had he been born in a more auspicious time, and had the Jewish people then not been deprived of light and air" (*Kämpfende Geister im Judenthum: M. Ch. Luzzatto*, p. 29).

In striking contrast with the poetic genius of Luzzatto stands his contemporary Jacob Daniel Olmo of Ferrara (1690-1757). Olmo, a Talmudist and Kabbalist, one of the three favorite disciples of Isaac Lampronti, the Talmudic encyclopædist,⁴⁸ while happy in some of the shorter liturgical poems, was a man incapable of sustained effort and possessed no inspiration or originality. His

⁴⁸ S. Z. Margulies in *האשכול*, V, 209; Neppi-Ghirondi, p. 137.

‘EDEN ‘ARUK (*Paradise Prepared*) which appeared in Venice simultaneously with Luzzatto’s epoch-making LA-YESHARIM TEHILLAH, is a long, tedious composition of 277 five-lined stanzas, and is original neither in matter nor in manner. It is an imitation of an imitation. The very fact that the poet chose Moses Zacuto as his model whom he follows slavishly in every detail, in the form of verse, in the stilted, artificial style, with its complexity of homonyms, with its conceit of the echo, only more exaggerated, and in the scheme of the subject itself, shows at once the meagerness of his poetic conception. The central thought of the ‘EDEN ‘ARUK is borrowed from the Midrashim and the Zohar (Bereshit Rabba, 62; Tanhuma, פקודי, sec. 3; Zohar, Bereshit, 38a, 39b, also פקודי and חרומה). The righteous man at the point of death addresses himself to those who surround him. Like Zacuto’s dying sinner, he rails against physicians. “Nature, when allowed free scope, has the power to ward off disease. But when disease and the physician combine against nature, the patient is doomed” (stanzas 1-12). He then addresses his wealth, his wife, and children, and realizes their powerlessness (13-27). He appeals to his righteous deeds to come to his rescue and they respond encouragingly in an echo of his own words (27-34), and then speak plainly of the great reward awaiting him (35-37). The righteous man then goes into ecstasies over the eternal glories in store for him (37-58) when an angel appears before him whom he asks the meaning of his glorious visions to which the angel replies in an echo (58-81). The angel then goes into a lengthy explanation (82-145) of the happiness awaiting him in Paradise, contrasting his life of privation, suffering, and humiliation on account of his righteousness while on earth with the eternal bliss which

is to be his portion in the life to come. Thereupon three groups of angels appear to greet and welcome him, when the Shekinah itself addresses his soul, kisses it, and the righteous man dies in ecstasy (145-158). The happy dead now describes the seven chambers of Lower Eden (159-218), the seven divisions of Upper Eden (219-276), and winds up with a song of thanksgiving (277).

That there is a great deal of poetic beauty in the midrashic and kabbalistic conception of Paradise will be readily admitted. Olmo, however, follows the Midrash and the Zohar too closely, too literally, to allow any display of originality, even had he possessed any. His Paradise is all glitter. Gold, silver, pearls, and diamonds of the most fantastic brilliancy are plentiful, but there is no definiteness, no vividness to the description. His hyperboles are best illustrated by the quotation from the Talmud which the poet paraphrases:

If all the oceans turned into ink,
If all the reeds assumed the shapes of pens,
The earth and heaven into scrolls were changed
And every man a scribe, and each were wise,
They could not tell the plenitude of glory.

Olmo's work is a continuation of the work and of the spirit of Moses Zacuto. Together, they gave a faithful reproduction of the Jewish conception of hell and heaven. Unequal though both Zacuto and Olmo were to their task, only kabbalists of their type with poetic inclination could have undertaken to reduce to poetic form the mysteries of the life beyond the grave. In this respect they rendered Hebrew literature a lasting service. Mediæval in spirit, they were the last representatives of mediævalism in con-

ception and in expression. With Olmo the artificial, complex, and involved style in vogue for so many centuries practically died. Henceforth the spirit of Luzzatto with its clearness, simplicity, and naturalness of expression reigns supreme.

The 'EDEN 'ARUK is introduced by well and faultlessly written commendatory poems of Abi'ad Sar Shalom Basilea (died 1743), kabbalist, geometrician, and astronomer, of Mantua, enemy of Frances in his EMUNAT HAKAMIM and friend of Luzzatto; and of the poet's father-in-law, Mordecai Zahalon (died 1748), physician and rabbi of Mantua.

CHAPTER V

LUZZATTO'S CONTEMPORARIES AND SUCCESSORS

While the personality and genius of M. H. Luzzatto dominates all subsequent Hebrew poetry of Italy, there flourished quite a number of minor poets in the time of Luzzatto who survived him, and in whose work his influence is manifested. Isaac Vita Musati of Ancona (about 1704—after 1800),⁴⁹ a semi-religious poet of that period, it is true, shows very little of the new spirit in his SHIRE ZIMRAH (Florence 1800), and his poems have but little poetic value. But he is the exception. The spirit of modernity finally triumphed. Nearly all the poets show in thought, diction, and versification, a complete breaking away from the past. Every conceivable Italian meter and rime is employed, no longer as an experiment but as a matter of course. The great bulk of the poetry of that century was occasional. The epithalamia and elegies

⁴⁹ In his Preface to his *Shire Zimrah* he states that he was 96 at the time of its publication (1800).

alone, written at that time, would form a volume of no small proportions; nor did the Italians neglect to celebrate in song any event of any importance connected with communal life. But even these occasional poems betray in some instances sparks of the divine fire, and are usually written with a finish, an elegance, and an ease that show their authors to have been masters of Hebrew verse.

Foremost among the contemporaries of Luzzatto, and one who caught his spirit most intimately, stands Israel Benjamin Bassani, rabbi of Reggio (1701; Piperno, 1703-Jan. 20, 1790). A son of Isaiah Bassani, the teacher of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, Israel Benjamin Bassani was thus brought in frequent contact with Luzzatto and consequently imbibed his spirit. Only a few of his poems are included in Piperno's Collection *ḲOL 'UGAB* (Leghorn 1846) and some fragments are quoted in Coen's *RUAH ḤADASHAH*; but these are sufficient to show his power as a stylist, and especially as a lyric poet. His *canzone* (*Ḳol 'Ugab*, No. 3) teems with lyric beauty, and the description of nature to which he devotes several stanzas stamps his lines as poetry of a high order. In another epithalamium (*ibid.*, No. 27) he describes the origin of a spark of electricity (the first mention of the subject in Hebrew poetry), comparing it with the flame of love that produced the affection in the couple in whose honor the poem was composed. Both poems are thoroughly original. The sonnets of his disciple and successor in the rabbinate of Reggio, Isaiah Karmi (*ibid.*, Nos. 25-26), show elegance and finish, as do four of his poems quoted by Coen (*Ruah Ḥadashah*, 98-101). To this class belongs the Venetian rabbi Simḥah b. Abraham Calimani (died Aug. 2, 1794), grammarian, linguist, orator, and Talmud-

ist. The author of an allegoric drama קול שמחה,⁵⁰ his elegy on Solomon Zalman of Lemberg (*Kol 'Ugab*, No. 16) shows his great ability in hyperbole but indicates a lack of good taste though the poem reads well and is perfect in rime and rhythm. The sonnet of Samuel b. Moses Cohen, rabbi of Leghorn (*ibid.*, No. 20), shows facility of expression but little ability; while the lines of Malachi Cohen, rabbi of Leghorn (died before 1790), talmudic methodologist, written in honor of the dedication of the synagogue in 1742 (*ibid.*, 21), are not above mediocrity. The same may also be said of his poems contained in the שבחי תורה (Leghorn 1746), an order of service adopted by the community of Leghorn to be recited on the 22nd of Shebat of each year in commemoration of the earthquake of 1742.⁵¹ On the other hand, Isaac Ḥayyim Frossolone (born at Sienna; died Leghorn 1794)⁵² is a master of versification. His epithalamium in eight octaves (*Kol 'Ugab*, No. 35), really a song of praise of the Talmud (written about 1786), is a finished production, while his other epithalamium (*ibid.*, No. 13) is a fine example of blank verse. Containing fine lines of nature description, it is suggestive of the best passages of Luzzatto, but gives suspicion of being an imitation of Israel Benjamin Bassani (cf. *ibid.*, No. 3), though written with more freedom and grace. Jacob Saraval, rabbi of Venice, later of Mantua (about 1707-April, 1782), is the author of a poem (*ibid.*, No. 23) commemorating the catastrophe which befell the

⁵⁰ I have not seen this drama. Neppi (345-6) states that he had published many other poems. See Steinschneider, *C.B.*, 2595; Mortara, *Indice*, 9; de Rossi and Fürst, *s. v.*

⁵¹ Landshut, *Ammude ha-'Abodah*, 173-177; Fürst, *Bibl. Jud.*, I, 320; Mortara, *Indice*, p. 15.

⁵² Piperno, in *Kol 'Ugab*, 80b; Mortara, p. 26.

Jewish community of Mantua in June 1781 when the building collapsed in which numerous guests were assembled at a Jewish wedding, and sixty-five persons were killed, among them the poet's oldest daughter. The poem in 26 sestets gives a vivid and a realistic description of the catastrophe and is naturally full of feeling.

Of greater interest is Abraham Isaac Castello, a type of the self-made man (1726—Aug. 1, 1789). Born at Ancona of poor parents, his father sent him at the age of thirteen to Leghorn where he was at first apprenticed to a tradesman. As it was the boy's habit to sing Spanish and Italian songs while working, his master's attention was attracted to his rich and melodious voice, and recommended him to the authorities of the Jewish community who were then without a cantor, the former cantor having just died. Castello was given the office, and married the former cantor's eldest daughter. Not content, however, with being merely a cantor, he devoted himself assiduously to the study of rabbinic literature and philosophy, developed remarkable powers as a preacher, and was held in high esteem both by Jews and non-Jews who disputed with him on religious and philosophic subjects. He preached usually in Spanish. While his life was a very happy and successful one, his latter days were rendered sad by the untimely death of his eldest son Joseph who died after an illustrious career at the University of Pisa where he took degrees in philosophy and medicine. As a poet, Castello is very happy, though not very deep. His lines are graceful and elegant, his versification masterly, and beautiful lyric stanzas are frequent. Like those of his contemporaries, his verses were occasional, ephithalamia and elegies. That he had some difficulty in gaining

recognition as a poet is shown by the following anecdote of his relation to the poet Colbo.⁵³ Emanuel Colbo, an older contemporary of Castello's, born at Salonica, whence he and his father migrated to Leghorn, and settled there as rabbis, the son also as a physician, had achieved fame as a poet, and his reputation stood in the way of the younger aspirant to poetic honors. The work of the former was praised at the expense of the latter. That the older poet did appreciate the talent of the younger, and was honest enough to admit the latter his equal is shown by the conspiracy they formed to render the senseless critics ridiculous. Upon a certain occasion when both poets were asked to write an epithalamium as was the custom in those days, the two men agreed to exchange poems, so that Colbo's work went by the name of Castello's and *vice versa*. The critics at once began to extoll the poem attributed to Colbo, and to underrate that of Castello. Thereupon Castello showed the letter of Colbo in which the permission to exchange names was given, and the critics were hushed once for all.⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, the quality of the work of the two men is equal. Colbo's stanzas are more artistic (he uses the seven-line stanza (*canzonette*) by preference), Castello's are more varied. While Colbo is always serious, Castello is also a satirist at times. Thus in a sonnet he satirizes the fool who

⁵³ M. H. Luzzatto wrote a poem in honor of his graduation as a physician from the University of Padua. Colbo who already in 1730 had been living in Leghorn was appealed to by Luzzatto to intercede with the Leghorn rabbis in his behalf. Leghorn was a stronghold of the Kabbalah while Venice was opposed to it since the days of Leon Modena. Kahana, "Life of Luzzatto," 33, 37.

⁵⁴ Piperno, *Kol 'Ugab*, Notes 4 and 11. Castello's poems are Nos. 10, 17, 22, 41-44, 53-63, 65; Colbo's Nos. 19, 34.

dresses in the latest fashion but betrays his foolishness the moment he opens his mouth, and ends with this gibe:

Why royal garments with a boorish voice?
Or change thy voice to suit thy dress,
Or change thy dress to suit thy voice.

(*Kol 'Ugab*, No. 43). In another sonnet (No. 54) he satirizes the miscarriage of justice. A fly falling in a spider's web is lost; a bird will brush it away with its wing and destroy it. A poor man falling into the meshes of the law is lost; a rich man tears the garment of justice asunder. An epithalamium (*Kol 'Ugab*, No. 18) written by his son, the brilliant young physician Joseph Castello who died so prematurely, (in a sonnet form with a double sestet), shows that he inherited his father's gift of song.

While all these minor poets, with more or less talent and inspiration sing only on special occasions, sing, as it were, to order, though their poems bear the stamp of modernity and they enlarged the scope of Hebrew poetry, the first truly modern lyric poet is Ephraim Luzzatto. Born at San Danieli, Friuli, in 1729, studying medicine at the University of Padua where he took his degree in 1751, he settled in London in 1763 to practise his profession in the hospital of the Portuguese Congregation. In 1792, on his way to Italy, he died in Lausanne, Switzerland. His poems, under the title of *ELLEH BENE HA-NE'URIM* (*These are the Offspring of Youth*, first edition, London 1766; second edition, Vienna 1839), were all written in Italy, the closing poem in Padua. A highly gifted youth, possessed of a sensitive nature, and endowed with the power of imagination and of delicate, artistic expression, Ephraim Luzzatto lent a new note to the severe and

strictly moralizing and didactic Hebrew muse by introducing the romantic lyric into Italian Hebrew poetry. As a Jewish poet he does not, indeed, neglect to sing of themes sacred to the Jewish heart. Thus, in 'AL HAR ZION SHE-SHAMEM' (*Mount Zion, Ruined*) he bewails in lines stately, dignified, yet soft and tender, the ruins of the Holy City. He addresses himself to all nature, to the stars in their courses, to the sun, the moon, the earth, the sea, the mountains, to arrest their natural functions, and intercede with God in behalf of Zion; when a terrific storm breaks out, and above the din and confusion an angel admonishes him that the cause of Zion's ruin is to be sought in Jewish sinfulness. Equally beautiful are his sonnets (35, 36) on the same subject. His didactic sonnets, teeming with lofty moral and ethical thoughts, are couched in such graceful diction that the severity of their tone is softened by the beauty of the expression. His elegies are free from the extravagances of fancy and the exaggeration of praise so characteristic of most of his contemporaries. He is the first to introduce Metastasio to Hebrew readers, and his translation of *La Primavera*, following the rime and meter of the canzonette, is a work of art in itself. But it is in his romantic sonnets that he is at his best. Here he gives his poetic fancy free scope. For the first time Cupid and his arrows are introduced to the Jewish reading public in Hebrew (Sonnet 3, p. 9, Letteris' edition); and he treats the subject with the levity, though not with the license so characteristic of Italian poets. Love with him, is not the sacred, divine spark it is with his kinsman Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto. With Ephraim Luzzatto it is rather human, all too human. In sentiment his exquisite love sonnets remind one of Petrarca and of the best in Italian literature, and in the delicacy

of diction, beauty of style, and perfection of rime and meter of the best in Hebrew literature. The Orient and the Occident thus meet in the friendliest fashion in this child of sunny Italy. It is to be regretted that his poetic work ceased upon his leaving his native soil. His prosaic duties at the London hospital proved fatal to his poetic inspiration.

Great as was the influence of the spirit of the classic literature upon Ephraim Luzzatto, it is slight compared with the paramount influence of classicism on his younger contemporary, the dramatist Samuel Aaron Romanelli (Sept. 19, 1757—Oct. 17, 1814).⁵⁵ A man of unsteady habits, of a restless, roving nature, he left his native city Mantua at an early age, and gave himself up to his *Wandermust*. He spent four years in Morocco; returning to Europe, he lived for a time in Berlin (1791), Vienna (1793), London (1799), Lille in France, and returned to Italy about 1800. In the course of his wandering he mastered several foreign languages, and wrote Hebrew and Italian with equal facility. Erratic in his temperament, tactless, and free and outspoken in his religious opinions which were not always orthodox, he made many enemies and but few friends. He eked out a scanty livelihood by teaching, and by writing poems in Hebrew and Italian for special occasions such as weddings, patriotic feasts, and the like. Owing to his roaming propensities and to his inability to make or to hold friends, so that his patrons soon tired of him, his existence was a rather precarious one. He was, perhaps, the first modern Jewish man of

⁵⁵ On Romanelli see della Torre in *Ben Chaniah*, V (1862), p. 27 ff.; Moise Soave in *Vessillo Israelitico*, 1878, pp. 151-2, and note 2, p. 152; and Dr. Weikert, Preface to Romanelli's translation of Maffei's "*La Merope*" (Rome, 1904).

letters to live by his pen, if one may call his scant earnings a living. He reminds one strongly of that erratic genius of our day, Naphtali Herz Imber, and of the unhappy career of that other unfortunate master, Solomon Maimon.

This literary Ishmael, however, was a darling child of the muses; and, with the two Luzzatto's, makes eighteenth century Hebrew poetry memorable. While he has not the softness, the tenderness, the delicacy and the *naïveté* which makes the older Luzzatto's dramas so conspicuous, he possesses a more vigorous, more incisive style; and what he lacks in sweetness he makes up in power and strength. Of a similar poetic temperament both, their sources of inspiration vary; Luzzatto is ideal, Jewish, and mystic; Romanelli is Greek and classic; the form is Italian in both. Luzzatto's symbolisms are ethical and philosophic; Romanelli's are mythological. Luzzatto's *LA-YESHARIM TEHILLAH* is, perhaps, the more original of the two, since Luzzatto had to clothe in flesh and blood the abstract virtues, and make them live before his readers; whereas the mythological characters Romanelli employs were ready made for him in classic literature. Still, Romanelli's interpretation of the Olympian deities are original, and there is no conflict in this meeting of Jew and Greek.

Romanelli's great melodramatic allegory under the name of *HA-ẔOLOṬ YEḤDALUN* (*Let the Strife Cease*), was written as an epithalamium (Berlin, 1791). Two forces are arrayed against each other in apparently deadly conflict; Venus (*Nogah*), Cupid (*Ḥeshek*), and Fortune (*Osher*) on the one hand are arrayed against Jupiter (*Zedek*), Constance (*Ḥosen*), and Glory (*Tiferet*)

on the other. Venus, and Jupiter as Justice, are the heroine and hero respectively of this allegory. Venus complains that the intelligent, the followers of Justice, are treating her with contempt because they maintain that Beauty is only a snare to capture the weak-minded. She rebels at the fact that her following has been reduced to the licentious, the foolish, and the fops. Where is the satisfaction in being worshipped by such a class? Jupiter, as the god of Justice, on the other hand, blames Venus for enticing every one away from him, so that people seek only pleasure and not justice and righteousness. Venus, in her contention, is ardently supported by Cupid and Fortune, while the cause of Justice is as ardently embraced by Constance and Glory. The two forces are about to engage in internecine conflict, both supported by Hope, when Peace (*Shalom*) descends from the heavens to settle the controversy. She declares that Justice and Venus are not incompatible. Both are indispensable for the happiness of mankind, and proves the possibility of their union by pointing to the union of the couple in whose honor the drama was written, as models respectively of wisdom and beauty united. Thereupon the clash of battle ceases (*Hakolot Yehdalun*) and peace reigns supreme.

Such is the theme of this strange drama. The battle is really a battle of words, but in what lofty strain, and in what magnificent diction this conflict of the gods is waged! It is, indeed, a battle worthy of the Olympians. The monologues are stately, dignified, eloquent, and poetic. The *arias* accompanying the monologues, intended for singing, add a lyric charm to the epic beauty of the drama itself, and serve as a summary of the thought of the preceding

speech. Thus after a lengthy monologue, Cupid sums up his power:

The rustle of each falling leaf,
The cooing of the gentle dove,
The roaring of the angry sea,
They, each and all betoken—love.

(Act I, Scene 7). The monologue of Hope (Act III, Scene 1) and of Peace (*ibid.*), are particularly striking and forcible. Romanelli, in this poem, shows himself master of style and diction, and the inspiration is sustained from beginning to end.⁵⁶

Romanelli also wrote a number of other poems of which, however, I have not been able to obtain a copy. As a translator he showed great skill in rendering into Hebrew Maffei's tragedy (*La Merope*) (published by Dr. Weikert, Rome 1904)—a translation which retains all the grace and vigor of the original.

Of Romanelli's contemporaries, Elijah Levi and Mattathias Levi son of Moses Zacuto Levi, chief rabbi of Monferrato (died 1832), both of Alessandria, are mediocre. The former is the author of an epithalamium *ברכת הו"ן* in 31 stanzas which is rather crude and uncouth in thought, while the epithalamium of the latter *ברכת הבית* though not quite so crude is an imitation of the work of his older kinsman. The two poems were published together in Leghorn in 1803. Hananiah Elhanan Vita Coen (died 29th of March, 1834), a teacher at Reggio, and later rabbi of Florence, while not a great poet is a master of

⁵⁶ Romanelli also wrote *רוח נכון* (Berlin 1792); *עלות המנחה* (Vienna 1793); *מחזה שרי*, and *תפוח זהב*, Letteris in *Bikkurim*, II; Zeitlin, *Bibl. Heb. post-Mend.* I have not been able to obtain a copy of any of these.

versification. As the author of *ZEMIROT ISRAEL* and *RUAH HADASHAH*, two works on prosody, he contributed not a little towards the modernization of Hebrew poetry in Italy. In his *RUAH HADASHAH* especially he advocates the abolition of the mediæval meter in which the *Yated* plays such a prominent part and speaks boldly in behalf of the adoption of a thoroughly modern Italian meter based on the number of vowels in each line without regard to the *Shewa*. The specimens of his poems with which he illustrates the varieties of the stanza show his thorough mastery of Hebrew verse and a fine sense of poetic appreciation;⁵⁷ while his elegy (*Ḳol 'Ugab*, No. 24), though somewhat exaggerated, shows him capable of deep feeling.

⁵⁷ See *Ruah Hadashah*, Reggio 1822.